

The Fool and the Monastic Heart

By Peter David Smith

I was listening to the audiobook of “Cities of the Red Night” by William S. Burroughs.

I was remembering my religious beliefs of years ago and the teenage struggling to understand everything from all of the religions of the world. The same struggling at that time to understand the world and the difference between the world and the path of righteousness or truth or goodness or hope.

I was thinking of the middle way, the twisty track which leads to Elfland.

There is a force of emotions, called belief or faith, which is able to overpower the sensations of the physical body.

Through faith it is possible for monks and nuns to endure the temptations of the flesh, to control the sensations of pleasure and pain but it is a never ending battle.

The person who walks away from the world and follows the path of faith, whether Buddhist or Christian or any other interpretation of the eternal, must understand that they will be called a fool by the people of the world.

I used to go to Sunday School when I was six, seven, eight, nine, ten years old. I had the stubbornness often associated with “the spectrum” and so would never use a swearword or listen to a dirty joke, but it was a defensive reaction against the aggressive posturing common to swearsy people.

I grew up Christian and then found out about Buddhism. I wanted to be a monk or a priest but I also wanted to follow all religions simultaneously. It was the time of the “New Age”. People were talking about Aquarius but there was a contradiction. They were taking drugs and having lots of sex. Of course they thought that my monastic outlook on life was “funny” and they jeered at me saying “You think the world is wrong!!” I had no answer to give them. I was too young to articulate what I thought was right or wrong.

People at work used to tell me, when I was 20, that one day I would regret being the way I am. They said that I would look back on my life and regret not having lots of sex, drink and drugs and not “enjoying myself” as they put it. They said “get your nose out of the book!”

I’m very old now and I look back on my life and I don’t regret my decision to concentrate on reading and trying to understand the world and the spirit. It is simply what I needed to do.

I have read so very many books. Jude the Obscure and The Pilgrim’s Progress, The Name of the Rose, The Glass Bead Game and Siddhartha, Science Fiction and technical manuals and on and on, devouring libraries.

We are a type of person who exists.

We are a type of person who wants to know what the hell is it all about?

And the others are a type of person who believe that they already know what it is.

For them it is all about sex. Or, perhaps sometimes, it is all about power, or money or ideology.

We are a type of person who is always the fool.

We don't know.

We are ignorant.

We have seen sex, money, power, politics. We have seen all the things which the people of the world say it is.

We still feel there is something else.

It has been the same down through the centuries. In every generation a minority of people are attracted to walk away from The World and seek the ways of The Heart, The Mind, The Soul, The Spirit or the Dharma.

Even so, there is a feeling that the known dogmas are not really IT.

We can say words like "god" or "dharma" but the words which seem to be the most true are the words which say "the truth which can be spoken is not the eternal truth".

For me it began with Christianity, though the beginning for other seekers on The Path might begin with Jewish synagogue or Buddhist temple. It begins wherever it begins and it goes on as the Journey of Life towards understanding of the Eternal.

We stumble along the road of knowledge and we make mistakes. We are frequently misled by the temptations of the flesh. We are also sometimes misled by false prophets and mountebanks.

Some history:

The Age of the Monasteries lasted from the period after the Christianisation of Rome until the beginning of the Age of Protestantism.

There were many false monks who lived by cheating and misleading the genuine seekers of Truth.

Rome's adoption of a Christian iconography had led to a world in which the ancient tribal groups were converted to a single faith. In that world Power was held by kings who bargained with popes while the simple people remained at the mercy of charlatans and heretic magicians who would sell the people fake talismans, such as pieces of the true cross or the bones of saints.

It was a world of straight roads and crooked roads. Rome would have you believe that the straight roads were the Way of Goodness.

Nevertheless, a different view than that of Rome was passed along through the years from the ways of the Ancient Tribes. The crooked roads and twisty tracks were the ways to Elfland and magic.

The tribes had always been there. The tribes were a natural evolution from the societies of our predecessors, the apes.

The natural bands of apes evolved. The Ice Age changed the diet and the behaviour of the apes. The ape groupings became tribes of humans. The elements of nature became gods. Magic ruled.

Try to picture the world in those days. Europeans had not yet learned of the existence of the Americas. That was the great good fortune of the North and South American tribes. The African tribes had not yet been invaded, colonised, robbed, enslaved and transported by the Europeans. The vast areas of Asia were going through a process similar to that of Europe. Both Europe and Asia were under a magic spell dragging them toward the building of THE EMPIRE.

When I speak of the Empire I am speaking of THE EMPIRE. The huge creature which was THE EMPIRE.

THE EMPIRE is a huge spirit which incorporates the tribes of the world into a oneness.

It was not merely the Greek one or the Roman one or the Carthaginians or the Trojans/Phoenicians or Persians or Egyptians. Empire exists as a THING in itself. Any simple tribe might develop into an Empire if they are possessed by the spirit of THE EMPIRE. They are all one.

In the first millennium A.D. the tribes of Europe included Goths, Vandals, Franks, Lombards, Slavs, Vikings, Celts, Avars, Huns and Bulgars. Some were well established like the Celts in the British Isles, others were in constant migration and cultural flux.

The magic of the tribes was generated by their beliefs and rituals. The people who eventually became the Romans themselves had begun in the same way. They had been merely one of the many tribes in Italy which grew into a little kingdom.

Then the Greek Empire established a strong base in Sicily at Syracuse.

The culture of Syracuse, as part of Magna Graecia, had developed to such an extent that the colony began to be as important as Greece itself. That was when power began to shift. The first glimmerings of Roman Power were kindled and, by the time of the full might of Rome in Europe, the Greeks became a mere secondary part of the Empire.

Thus it was that the magic of Europe was divided between the imperialist magic of Greco-Roman geometry and logic versus the ancient magic of all the other tribes.

A gradual transformation of the world was in progress. A transformation of tribes into kingdoms which were client states of the Empire.

THE EMPIRE.

Greece gives way to Rome and Rome gives way to Holy Rome. Holy Rome gives way to protestant European capitalist trading Empires. Then the Great Powers of Europe and Japan play their power games until split by huge World Wars of technological MIGHT which give way to the Super Powers of the Cold War.

Thus, step by step, the mindset of EMPIRE has brought the world to the edge of human extinction.

In the world of Empires the magic of the Tribes and of the twisty track to Elfland persist in the forms of ritual and rhythm, hypnosis and herbalism, words and gestures, archetypes and intuitions.

And we search.

Simple individuals.

Searching along the Road of Life. Seeking understanding.

We meditate on the meaning of The Trinity, the functions of the Father as progenitor, the Son as Power on Earth and the Holy Spirit in its dual role of continuance and progression.

Or we meditate on the Tao which is the eternal Mystery of opposites and energies.

Or we meditate on the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The Generator, the Operator and the Destroyer. The Existence, the Consciousness and the Bliss.

Or we meditate on the mystery of Isis the resurrector of Osiris and the struggle between Horus and Set.

Or we meditate on the Dialectic of Hegel and the Speculative world of phenomenology.

We are all on a road to discover the truth and to understand the meaning.

And so we go on. We are the Fools of God.

We are the people of the Great Paradox.

Somehow there can be a great future. Somehow the World of The Empire can be transformed into the world of Caring.

The Planet Earth eventually becomes divided into a river delta of timelines.

On some of these timelines the world is divided into three sectors:

The Monastics.

The Tribes.

THE EMPIRE.

On that timeline the Monastics wander everywhere throughout the world and are sometimes used by either the Tribes or THE EMPIRE in their intrigues against each other.

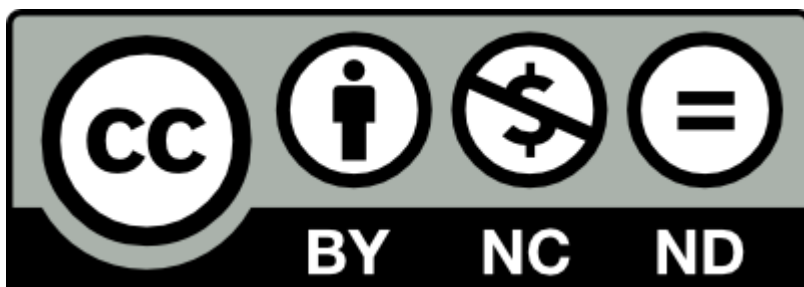
Sometimes the Spirit of Wander will lead these monks through a portal into an entirely different world. To cross between timelines was always the true meaning of THE CROSS.

With help from the Goddess Heqat, sometimes called Hecate, Monks will sometimes find their way into the world of the “Thought Police” or the Fordist-Malthusian world of Alphas and Betas. Members of the Tribes and THE EMPIRE seldom pass through these portals.

For the truly foolish and holiest of monks it is sometimes possible to visit many, many worlds of utopia, dystopia, apocalypse, extinction and the occasional world of complete and utter incomprehensibility. Those worlds are the result of allowing surrealists into the planning departments.

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